

Minister's pastoral letter for 2 May from Rev Karen James

"...let everyone be quick to listen and slow to speak..." (James 1:19)

Dear Friends,

Last weekend was the Southampton District Synod and as part of the day's events, Rev Matt Finch, the Connexional Pioneer and Church Planting Officer, spoke about 'New Places for New People'. This is a part of the wider 'God for All' Report which lays out a strategy for evangelism and growth in the Methodist church over the next five years. (More information can be found here; [Evangelism and Growth \(methodist.org.uk\)](https://www.methodist.org.uk) and [conf-2020-4-evangelism-and-growth.pdf \(methodist.org.uk\)](#)). It was heartening and encouraging to hear stories of growth (in faith and discipleship as well as numbers) that have taken place during the pandemic and to listen to the possibilities and opportunities that exist around our district.

What was clear throughout the presentation was the need to listen and to make prayer the life and breath of all that we plan and do. These are not new ideas, but they are concepts of which it is good to be reminded.

To listen to God; to listen to each other and ourselves; to listen to the community.

Attentive listening- not just listening so we know when we can chip in with our thoughts and responses but to be present in the moment and really hear what is being expressed and what is not. That as we pray, we are alert to God's response- which may not be immediate and may well come from a surprising source!

As we are slowly emerging from restrictions and re-orientating ourselves to the way we will be living, it is essential that we do continue to listen well. There will be so many needs that we will want to serve but being pro-active in prayer- particularly in the listening part of prayer -will mean that we are more likely to do the most good, wherever and in whatever we are guided.

Listening and praying are key elements of being disciples, alongside sharing with others how our story and God's story interconnects and transforms us. The theologian John Stott, talked of a 'listening ear' being at the heart of everything that we do as disciples because 'being the hands and feet of Jesus first requires us to use our ears' (from LICC [London Institute for Contemporary Christianity] 'Word for the Week' 26/04/21).

As we find our way through the next few days, weeks, and months- may we listen well and be gentle with those who are still finding their confidence, to those who are desperate to be out and about again, to those who need to rest and regroup and, in all things, may we first and foremost listen to what you have to share with us O God. Amen

Every blessing

Rev Karen